

The Miracle of 19 Debunked

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By Hikmat

Recently a new sect of Islam is burgeoning among some pseudo intellectual Muslims who on one hand cannot accept the stupidities preserved in the Hadith as they cast a dark shadow on Muhammad and Islam presenting it as a barbaric, irrational and inhumane religion and on the other hand they are unable to sever their umbilical cords with Islam altogether. They are called the Submitters. They deny the Hadith and maintain that only Quran should be relied as the guidance for the Muslims. But they go farther and claim that Quran contains a numeric miracle that is based on the number 19.

<http://www.submission.org> [1]

In their response, Hikmat, an ex-Muslim young lady friend of mine from India wrote the following article.

The basic question is-- "does style decide the validity of content?"

Style is "how" a thing is presented.

Content is "what" is presented. (meaning)

My answer is No. Style cannot decide the validity of content.

Proof – same thing can be presented in different styles and different things can be presented in the same style. So there is no correlation between style and content.

If we take the meaning of style in a broader sense it includes the language it is presented, oral or written, hand written or printed or engraved, medium of print, if it is written font type, size, color etc. If we take style pertain to structure, it comprise of objective (number of letters, number of words, number of paragraphs or lines etc.) and subjective (is it beautiful, rhythmic, eloquent, aesthetically presented etc.) qualities.

Almost from every religion some claim that their scriptures contain mathematical miracles. Submitters claim that Quran is "mathematically" structured and so it is a miracle and consequently divine. They claim that Quran contains many "features" which are multiples of 19. It was first explained in a monograph by Rashad Khalifa, Ph.D entitled "Computer manifested Miracles in the Holy Qur'an".

Assuming even if its structure is "mathematical" , it does not make its contents automatically valid. We have to examine the content to decide its validity.

I would like to show whether it is a "miracle" or not from technical point of view without going into the content of Quran.

Does mathematics prove this as a miracle? On the contrary mathematics show that it is not a miracle. No mathematician takes submitters claim as serious. Because, it contains fundamental flaws.

It is a lie-free deception.

But it is not so easy to convince people of this conclusion; because when you read

Khalifa's work you can't help but be struck by how amazing it sounds. It really is very impressive. It is also true! Khalifa was not lying about his arithmetic; accidental errors aside, all his "features" are really there.

The trick is simple. From any book, you can select "options" or "features" or "Items" or what ever you call them. Like in the present case, number of words, number of letters, number of chapters, number of times a word occurs etc. the options are infinite. You can have combination of options like number of letters in the chapter names, number of letters in the odd chapters, number of letters in the even chapters,...so on. Chances are that some of the options are multiples of 19 or for that matter any number.

List out the options that are matching with your criteria (i.e. multiples of 19). How many options you think you will get? Thousands and thousands! With slight change in the definition of the options you can get still more options. So what submitters are showing is, the options that matched with their criteria. What about the options that they left?

The real mathematical person will ask:

What is the number of options available?

What percentage of options meeting your criteria? If the percentage is much higher than the statistically allowed probability, then we can call it some kind of "structured" or in the submitters language a "miracle".

As I have told, there are infinite number of options and you can get thousands of options that are multiples of any particular number from any book.

To give a crude analogy, it is something like this. From any beach with coarse sand, It is possible that you can find some sand grains exactly weighing say one gram. How many you will get? It depends on how long you spend to collect the "required" grains. Then you bring all the sand grains each exactly weighing one gram and claim that the beach is miracle and one gram is miracle number. If you do not know how many sand grains I discarded which are not fitting in my scheme, you may think it is a miracle.

Rashada Khalifa did exactly same with the Quran.

What can be possible features from Quran?

Number of letters in each verse, number of letters in each Surah, total number of letters in the whole book, number of letters in 1 St chapter, 2nd chapter....n th chapter. Now substitute word for letter.

Number of time the word God (or any other word for that matter) occurs, number of nouns, places, animals. etc. creativity is the limit.

If number of letters in each chapter is coming as a multiple of 19 then take that category, if it is not fitting, check whether total number of letters in all the chapters is fitting into the scheme. With permutations and combinations (like adding chapter numbers and verse numbers) he could derive many features, which he calls as mathematical miracle of the Quran.

What about the thousands of other features that are not matching his criteria (like discarded sand grains)?

With slight shift in the definition of what is being counted, he could show more "impressive" list.

Some anomalies in Khalifa's method.

1) Traditionally, in Islam the consensus of the reciters has had greater authority than any particular written text. Khalifa generally used the received text of the Quran known as Hafs, written in the Egyptian style. There are other received texts, which differ in certain respects from the text he used. Warsh (another common version), differs with Hafs in spelling. Though both versions are same in meaning when it comes to counting words and letters both are "different" Qurans. \

1. He altered the Quran to fit into his scheme. (He claims he restored it to its original)

If we define the "Qur'an" to mean the 'Uthmanic text as accepted today, he changed some verses based on pronunciation and Tashkent Quran. (bastatan in 7:69 and Nuwn in Sura 68) but he has not incorporated all other variations from the text. then the question is why only two variations were adopted and why not others?)

2. He eliminated the last two verses of Sura 9.

3. As far as combination of Sura and verse numbers coming to multiples of 19, it should be understood that the division of verses in the Quran is based on five different systems:

the Kufah system, following the tradition of Ali;

the Basra system, following Mohammed's companion Asim ibn Hajjaj;

the Shami system of Syria used by Mohammed's companion Abdu'lla-h ibn Umar

the Makkah system and

the Madinah system.

This makes it obvious that Mohammed did not undertake the division into verses.

As far as the ordering of the Suras is concerned this was done by Khalif Uthman (Information from "Dictionary of Islam", pages 489-492).

The division of verses or ordering of Suras, which form the "Structure" of Quran was not originally there but introduced later. So any miracle nature attributed involving the number of Suras or verses is not part of Quran.

4. What exactly is being counted? Just words or meaning of the words?

Some times only words were counted irrespective of their meaning. Wherever it is not adding up, same word is not counted basing that it was used in a different meaning.

5. Some times all grammatical forms of the words were considered. Some times not. For example in considering singular, dual, and plural forms of a word the criteria appears to be multiple of 19.

There are other features of Quran which are multiples of 7, 11 etc. any one with a lot of time to waste can come up with any number of "features" from any book which are multiples of any number. I have seen a document in circulation on the Internet showing the "Mathematical" patterns in the document "the declaration of independence" of USA and "predicting" the future events from the pattern. Obviously it was floated for fun just to show how easy it is to fool people with "mathematical"

patterns.

A last word about “Patterns” in poetry. I do not know much about Arabic poetry, but I am aware of meter in some of the Indian languages, where each line of a verse has certain fixed number of letters.

Each type of poem has fixed letters in it. Few years ago, when I visited south India, I personally observed a performance by a poet what is called as “Sathavadhanam”. It is a well-known art form (a kind of competition between poets) I feel it is relevant to mention it in this context. The main poet is called an “Avadhani.” He competes with hundred other poets.

On a stage the hundred poets sitting ready to pose Questions or riddles to the Avadhani. Each one will ask a question and specifies in which poetic form he wants the answer. Very often the questioner request that the answer should contain in a particular type of poem (number of letters are fixed) and it should contain certain words or not to containing certain words or letters or combination of letters. They specify all odd combinations and the most difficult questions. As soon as the questioner finished his request the Avadhani is ready with the answer by composing a poem instantly without using any pen and paper and moves on to the next questioner. After listening hundred different questions from these hundred people Avadhani starts answering by reciting poems in the form requested by the questioner. He answers to all the questions in the order it was asked. He does not note down the questions. Apart from this the avadhani should keep track of the count of bells that were rung time to time to distract him.

I was told that this kind of art is performed by many poets and there are innumerable poets who perform this at a smaller scale with 8 questioners, which is popularly known as “Astavadhanam”.

It is a matter of seconds for this kind Avadhanis to compose any poem with any specification and style. But no one considers them as miracle. It is their creativity coupled with years of practice and concentration. I wonder what the Avadhanis say if asked to “produce a Sura like it...”

Fortunately these Avadhanis do not know Arabic. Other wise God knows how many “miracle” Suras have been produced!

Also the Christians have come with their own version of the [mathematical miracle of the Bible](#) [2]. See the following link.

<http://www.greaterthings.com/Word-Number/CenterofBible/Psalm118.htm> [2]

An interesting study: [The Law of Truly Large Numbers \(coincidences\)](#) [3]

Links:

[1] ../external.html?link=http://www.submission.org/

[2] ../external.html?link=http://www.greaterthings.com/Word-Number/CenterofBible/Psalm118.htm

[3] ../external.html?link=http://skepdic.com/lawofnumbers.html

